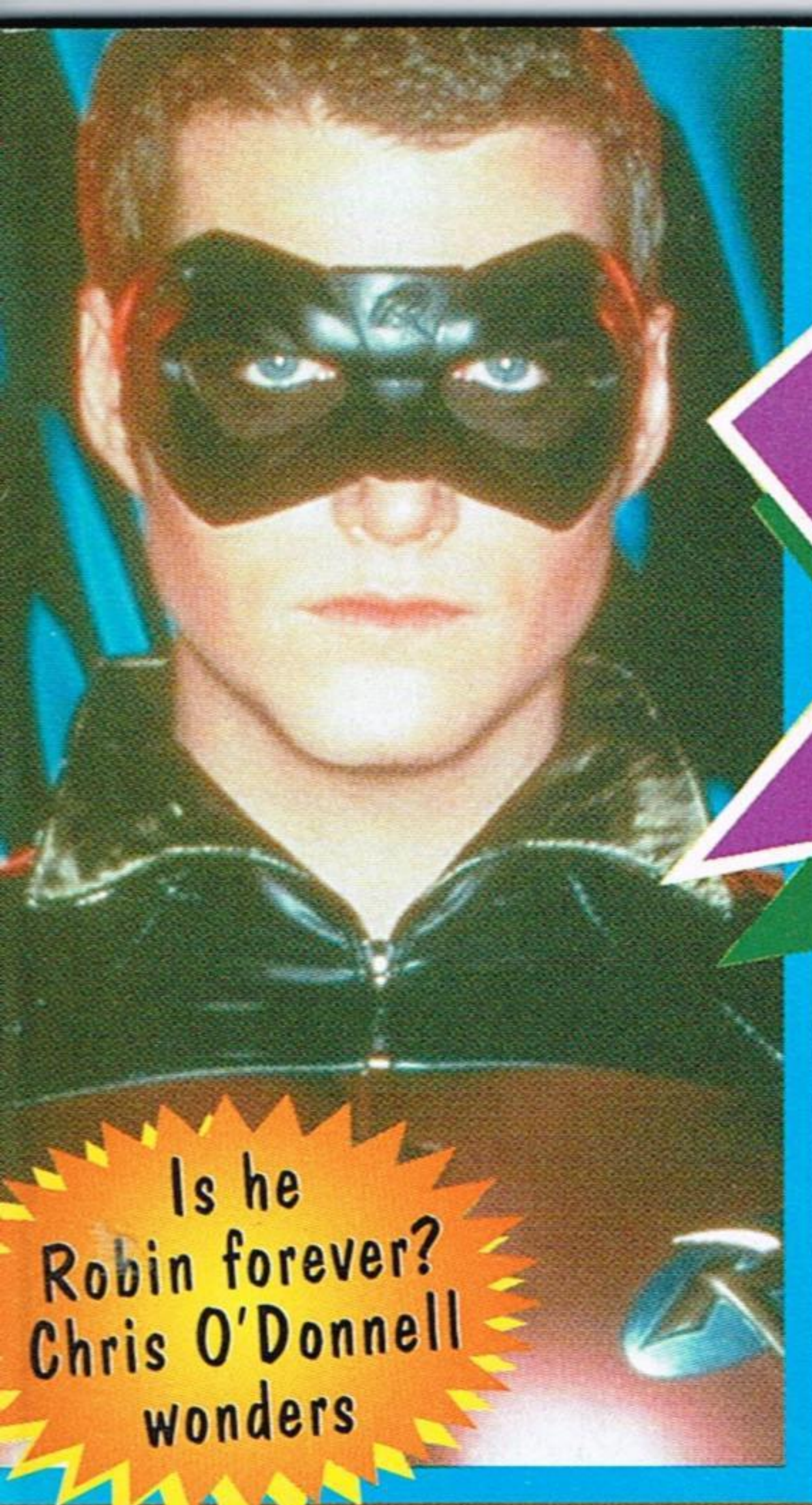




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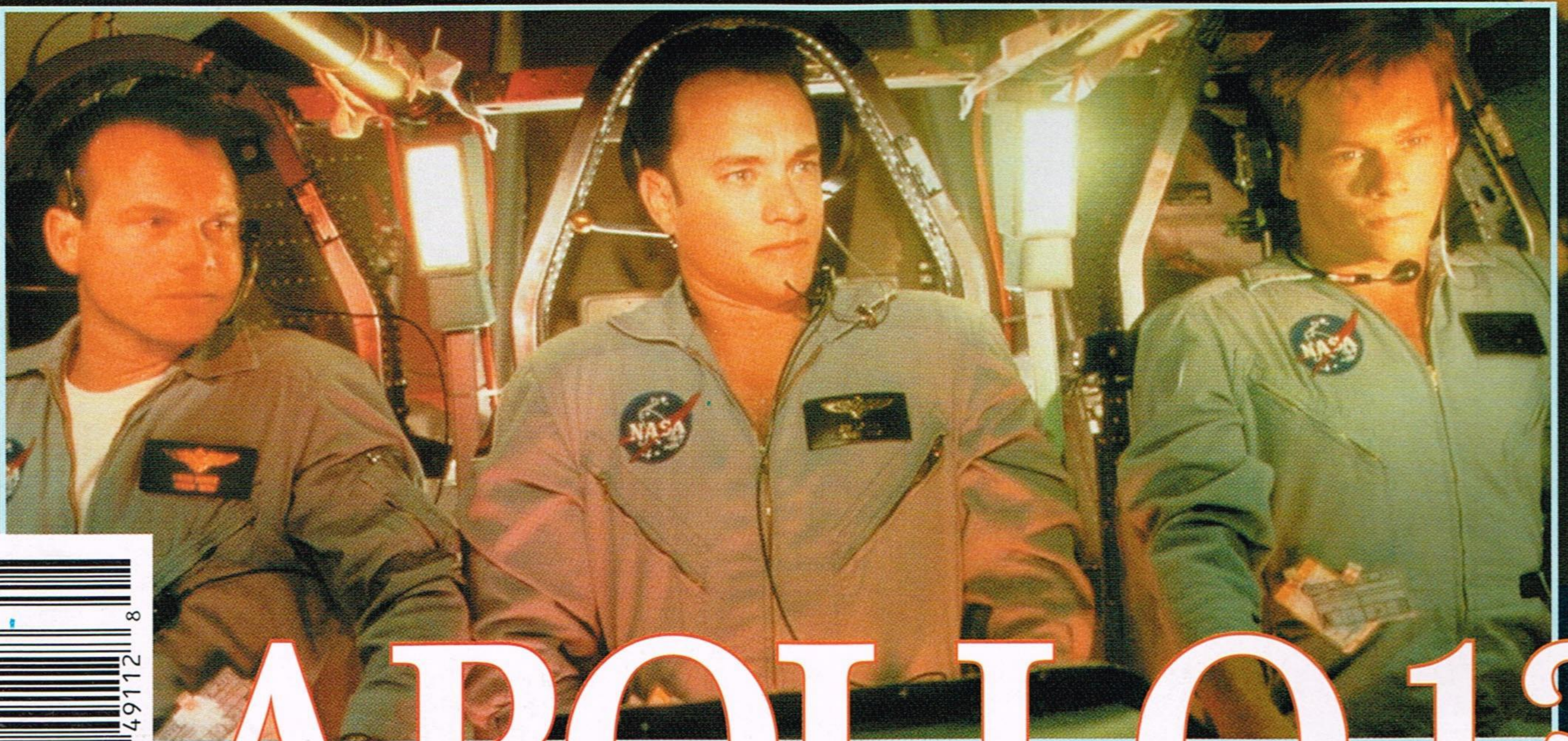
AUGUST #217

Is he
Robin forever?
Chris O'Donnell
wonders

CONGO
Frank
Marshall's
hi-tech
jungle epic
SPECIES
Breeding
alien
horror

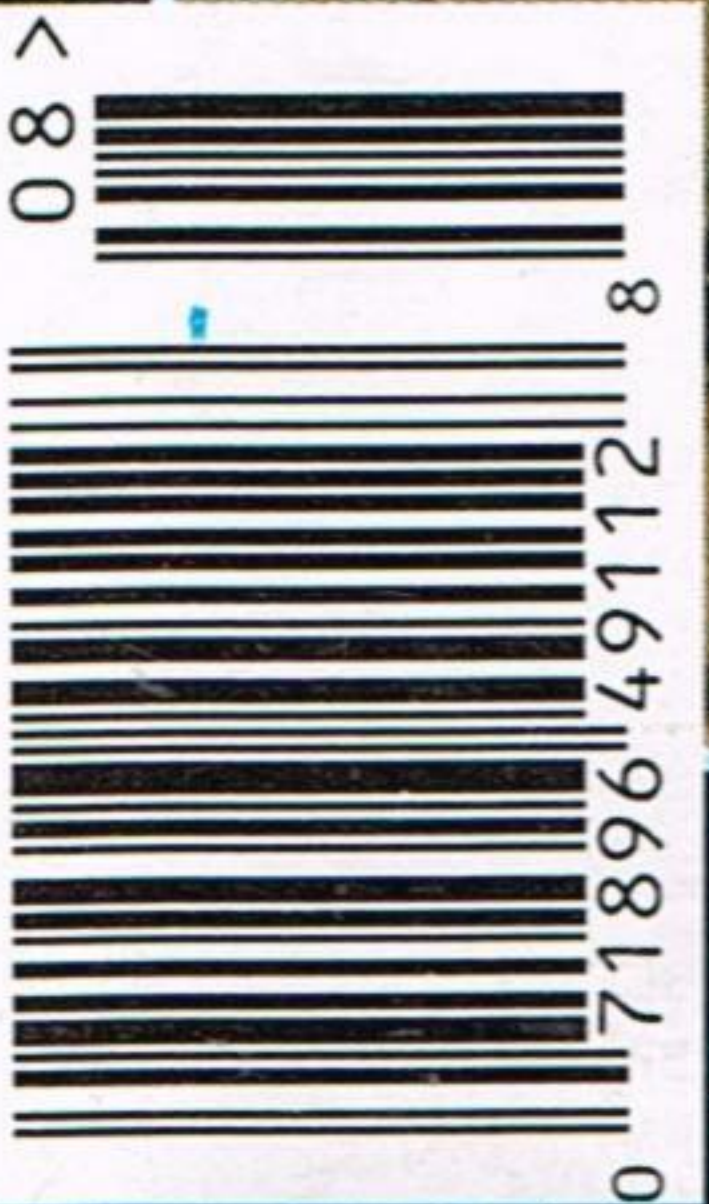


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ROBIN FOREVER

By MARC SHAPIRO

Heroically, Chris O'Donnell assumes the role of a lifetime.

Chris O'Donnell's girl friend is dying to see him in his form-fitting Robin costume in the privacy of his own home and the young actor is doing his best to humor her.

"I probably shouldn't be saying this, but I've been trying to sneak the costume out of the wardrobe department," chuckles O'Donnell. "I really want this costume!"

But O'Donnell, dressed casually during a mid-morning conversation in a Warner Bros. conference room, concedes that he has had little time to plot the theft of his *Batman Forever* outfit. In town for a few days to do some pickup shots and some selected *Batman Forever* interviews, the actor is also continuing to discuss his recently-released romantic comedy *Circle of Friends* while warming up to support his third film of 1995, *Mad Love*. Despite his calm demeanor and accommodating nature, O'Donnell admits to being a little impatient with the interview process.

"At least with *Batman*, it's a different kind of questioning," he says. "With the other films it's always, 'How did you get into the business,' and I get real sick of that. Then, they ask, 'What was it like to work with Al Pacino in *Scent of a Woman*?' I still get that one. Now, it's *Batman*."

O'Donnell, who also completed a degree in marketing at night while filming *Batman Forever*, feels that this role as the Boy Wonder certainly won't hamper a career that began in the modest entry *Men Don't Leave* and has progressed through such films as *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *The Three Musketeers*. "I feel like it's a breakthrough. I don't see being in what will probably be one of the top-grossing movies of the year hurting my career. It's a definite career-making movie."

O'Donnell and *Batman Forever* director Joel Schumacher had discussed the movie early in 1993. The conversation, recalls the young actor, was more small talk than substance. "Joel said, 'I might be doing this *Batman* movie and I would like to work with you at some point.' There was nothing specific." So, with nothing firm in the offing,

O'Donnell went off to Ireland to make *Circle of Friends*. While on that film, he received a phone call from his agent with the offer to play Dick Grayson, the vengeance-minded circus performer-turned-crimefighter.

"I was psyched! I was really jazzed to get the part." A big reason for O'Donnell's enthusiasm was that he knew, from reading the script and talking with Schumacher, that "I wasn't going to be playing a '90s Burt Ward version of Robin."

"I had already seen the previous two *Batman* movies, so I already knew the movies were different from the TV series. I knew this movie was going to be a different situation and that this Robin was going to be totally different."





No dweeby tights and elf booties for this crime fighter! O'Donnell's Robin gets a hi-tech metallic suit just like the one Val Kilmer's Batman wears.

The actor admits to being a novice when it comes to the Bat-mythos. While he was growing up, the Caped Crusader's comic book adventures took a backseat to *Richie Rich* and *Spider-Man*. "There was not much research involved. But they did send me a couple of the comic books that showed me Robin's background. Reading the comics, I saw how they were going to handle the circus sequences and the death of Dick's parents. For me, it wasn't so much research as it was preparation."

O'Donnell offers that his preparation for playing Robin didn't really kick in until his trip to the Bat-costume shop. "My initial reaction was relief—that I wasn't going to have to wear the comic book outfit that Robin wore. I knew I would never wear green tights. I would look just awful in them."

"When I went to the costume department, I figured it would just be your typical wardrobe fitting," he continues. "Boy, was I surprised! They had to make a full-body mold, and so I ended up standing in

this very uncomfortable position while they poured plaster all over my body. I've never spent a more uncomfortable day in my life."

But it was the costume that ultimately opened the door to discovering the

"I was really jazzed to get the part."

essence of playing a comic-book crime-fighter. "I was in the finished costume, walking out to the set, when I looked at myself in a mirror. I thought, 'Wait a second! It's Robin!' I was suddenly into the character and getting an idea of what it's like to be a superhero."

Initially, O'Donnell was not aware of the similarities in the origins of Batman and Robin. But once he read up on the characters' history, he found the clues to making the scenes between Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson sizzle. "Robin's origin

does mirror Batman's, and that's obviously why Bruce sympathizes with Dick to the extent that he does. Bruce keeps telling him that they're basically the same, but Dick just doesn't want to hear it. I tell him, 'Look buddy! We have *nothing* in common!'

"This Robin offers many more dimensions than the comic book and TV Robins ever did," he says of his character's strengths. "He's a self-reliant kid with an earring who offers much more of a challenge to Batman. He's frustrated, and he has gone through a very traumatic experience. Dick is a tough, cocky kid with a motorcycle and a leather jacket. His initial reaction to Bruce Wayne is not good. He resents the hell out of him. At the same time, he's bent on revenge against Two-Face for killing his parents and family. What I like about Dick is that he is played with a '90s kind of realism. I feel like I'm playing this character the way he should be played."

Dark Knights

Memories of filming *Batman Forever*, according to O'Donnell, focus on the spectacle. "Something was going on just about every day. A fight, or something with the Batmobile or an action sequence involving Two-Face and the Riddler. You tend to get into the spirit of it all after awhile. Normally, I don't like it when people not involved with filming are on the set. But we had tours coming through all the time. I would be doing a scene and behind the camera, all these friends of executives would be standing there and I would wave. It was definitely fun just being on the set."

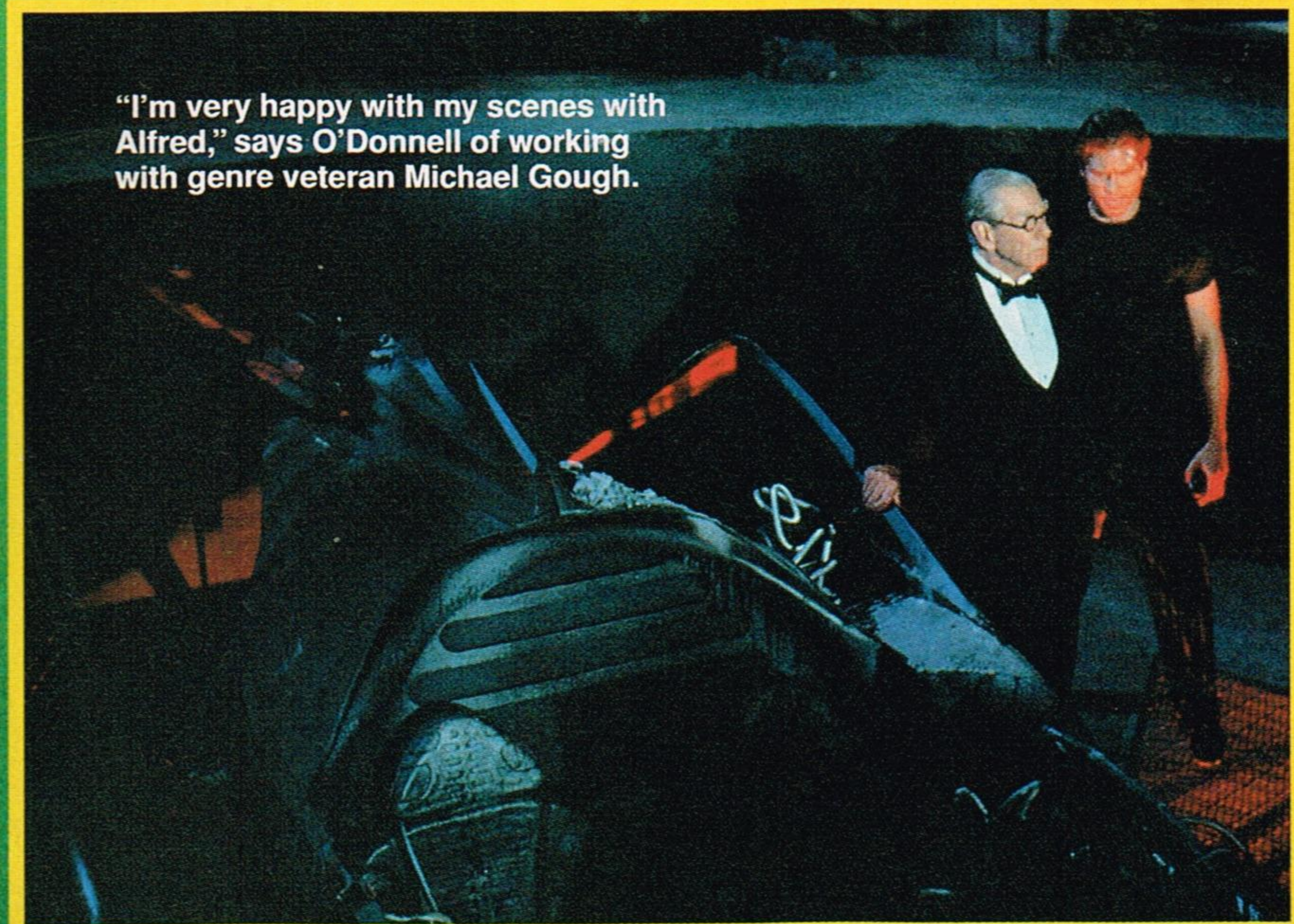
Although the budding Boy Wonder relates "that I can't really give too much away," with a little prodding, he offers some samples of the *Batman Forever* hijinks. There was the night on the Warner Bros. lot where Dick Grayson, after stealing the Batmobile for a joyride, drove into a rather seedy part of Gotham City to save a "lady of the evening" from a gang of thugs.

"It was great. The singing group En Vogue was out there working as extras and I got to beat the crap out of Don 'The Dragon' Wilson. There were about 400 extras there that night and the atmosphere was definitely different."

He also smiles at the memory of a sequence, done mostly by his stunt double, in which he sneaks down to the Batcave by flipping off a bannister, off a chandelier and finally off a wall. "It's going to look very cool. I'm not the kind of person who's so macho that I have to do my own stunts. I'm not that crazy. But I did do a great deal of martial arts fighting and I have a particular fight with Two-Face and his henchmen that turned out real well."

But it wasn't all fun and games during

the *Batman Forever* shoot. "I just did a stunt a few days ago that was easily the scariest thing I did in this movie. I was submerged in a tank of water for some closeups of Robin being attacked by some frogmen. I'm wearing this Bat-breathing device and, at one point in the scene, they rip it out of my mouth and I'm struggling like I can't breathe. I was weighted down so there was no way I could swim to the top. I'm thinking to myself, 'What if I really can't breathe? Will they think I'm just acting or that I'm really drowning?' The water was so murky that when they would hand me a breathing device, that sometimes



"I'm very happy with my scenes with Alfred," says O'Donnell of working with genre veteran Michael Gough.

All Batphotos: Courtesy Warner Bros.

I couldn't see far enough in front of me to grab it. A couple of times, I thought I was actually going to drown."

O'Donnell's memories were not only of the action-packed scenes. The day they shot the bigtop death of the Grayson family at the hands of Two-Face stands out. "It was an emotional scene, but it was not that bad. It was not as heavy

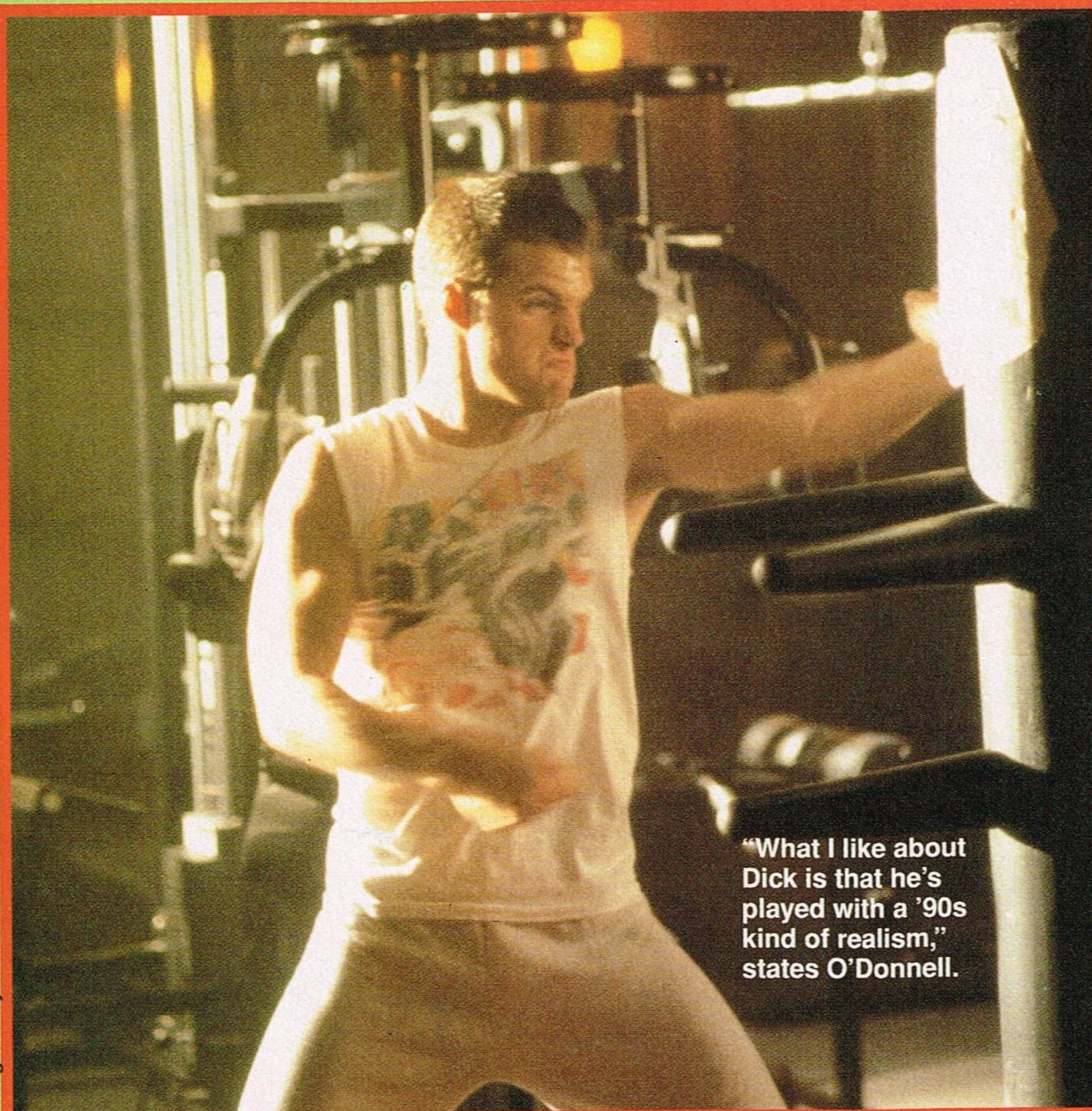
as some real-life drama. This is Batman and Robin. This is a comic book. You could never get away from the fact that this is a comic book."

He also reflects favorably on the scenes with Val Kilmer and Michael Gough. "The scenes between Val and me are very powerful but, to be honest, not a whole lot of preparation went into making the scenes work. We just kind of worked things out and did it. I'm very happy with my scenes with Alfred; especially when Dick is talking to him about his parents. Those scenes felt real to me."

Light Daze

O'Donnell's memory turns from *Batman Forever* to *Batman* and *Batman Returns*. He was in his seat, popcorn in hand, for both of those adventures and has his own opinions about the two Robinless movies. "The first one was wild. Nobody really

The short hair, the earring, the black attire—Chris O'Donnell is an all-new kind of Boy Wonder for the '90s.



"What I like about Dick is that he's played with a '90s kind of realism," states O'Donnell.

knew what to expect because it was so different from the TV show. I thought Jack Nicholson was really funny as the Joker. The second movie was just too dark for me. I thought Catwoman was damned sexy, but the movie as a whole was just too dark."

Would either of those films have worked with Robin in them? "It's hard to say," he admits. "I do know that they would have been totally different films. Robin would have totally changed the storylines."

But Robin is on hand for *Batman Forever* and O'Donnell is earnest in claiming that his presence is important to the film's storyline. "He's not there from the get-go. In fact, depending on how they edit the film, he probably won't be seen until well into the movie. But his storyline is important because it opens up a new era for these films. Before, it was just Batman. From now on, it will be *Batman and Robin*."

O'Donnell has probably had one of the least bumpy careers of any of the current crop of post-Brat Pack young actors. "The luckiest break I could have gotten was the first movie I did, *Men Don't Leave*. It was a good movie that nobody saw, but I made acquaintances on that film who gave me a lot of help when I got to Hollywood. Because I was fortunate enough to get something good, I didn't have to do a lot of crap at first. You can look through all the video shelves you want. I have no skeletons in my closet."

"After *Men Don't Leave*, I wasn't really sure that I wanted to pursue an acting career, so I probably came across as a bit of a snob. There were many things I could have done, but I went back to school instead. After, I would only do things that were really good. *Scent of a Woman* was the next big breakthrough, although doing *The Three Musketeers* gave me a good introduction to action. In fact, the swordfighting choreography I had to learn on that film was much tougher than many of the things I've done on *Batman Forever*."

As in the comics, the violent demise of Dick Grayson's family sends him down the bloody road of vengeance.

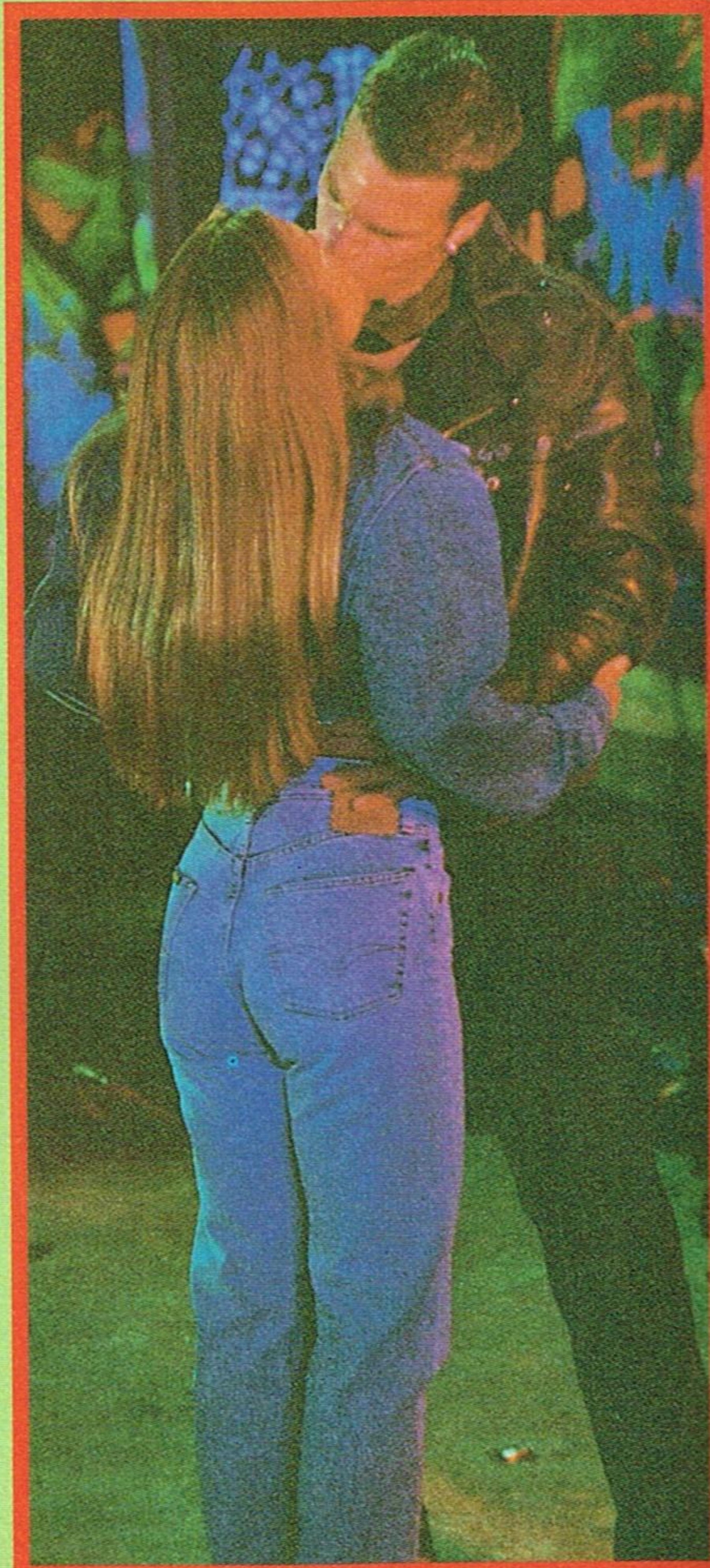
Next up for O'Donnell is the comics-derived *The Men in Black*. This time, O'Donnell will partner with Tommy Lee Jones as mysterious dark-clad guys who investigate UFO sightings. Barry (*The Addams Family*) Sonnenfeld directs.

O'Donnell recalls *Batman Forever* director Schumacher coming up to him at one point during filming and asking "if I was happy with the role and how I was playing Robin. I said I was. He said that's good because you may be playing him for a long time."

The actor is not adverse to portraying the Dark Knight's partner again, but he's cautious about being Robin forever. "I would like to do another one. Depending on how this one comes out and how well it does; yeah I would be happy to do it again. But three, four or five more of these? Jeez! I guess I would have to think about that."

"I would love to see Robin get his own gadgets. In this film, I basically had to borrow everything from Batman. I would be excited to see a first draft of a script for a sequel."

"I would *definitely* come back if Robin has a love interest," Chris O'Donnell laughs. "I would love for Catwoman to come back. Maybe Robin could put the moves on her. But Batman would probably end up with Catwoman and I would end up as Robin, the frustrated crimefighter." ❄



"I would definitely come back if Robin has a love interest," notes O'Donnell of his sequel plans.